

TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT NETWORK NURSES - TPCHD

The Network is comprised of 5 Public Health Nurses. These nurses have experience in Epidemiology, Clinic Systems, Immunizations, Management, Communicable Disease, Sexually Transmitted Disease, Family Planning, Maternal/Child Health, Marketing Writing and editing.

The goals of the Network program are to:

- Promote partnership between the private medical community, other ancillary providers and the Tacoma Pierce County Health Department
- Increase reporting of communicable disease and unusual events (possibly related to Bioterrorism)
- Promote use of public health prevention programs and resources

To succeed at controlling communicable disease and be prepared to face the threat of terrorism, the public health and private medical care system must work as partners. Disease control programs need case reports from private medical providers to trace contacts and track disease trends. Private medical providers need the most current treatment information and prevention strategies available through their local health department. Their busy practices may limit the time they have for gathering knowledge about community resources for their patients. Perceptions (and realities) of how health departments tend to do business may inhibit provider's attempts to take advantage of the resources available through the local health department.

Public health nurses can strengthen communication between private medical providers and public health departments. At the Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, these nurses, known as the NETWORK visit every private provider in the county 4 times a year with up to date information on communicable diseases and other public health issues. The goals of the Network include increased communicable disease reporting, assuring access to care and improving quality of care for communicable diseases in the general community. The Network provides consultation on public health issues for private medical providers, hospital systems, long term care facilities, home health agencies, community service agencies, schools, child care providers and associations, licensing agencies and drug and alcohol treatment facilities. We also provide consultation and support for the clinics that have contracted with the health department to provide clinical services for categorical care (STDs, family planning and TB).

The Network Nurses often use more of a Marketing style in their approach, for example: selling the idea of a new concept in patient care as in the need to do more complete risk assessment, routine testing and counseling of patients related to STD and HIV. All the sections of Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department are integrating their efforts and working on common goals, therefore the Network promotes the use of programs and resources as with "Clean Air for Kids" a program to reduce the incidence of Asthma in children, or tobacco cessation and violence prevention programs.

Through quality assurance record review, the Network evaluates educational needs for the contract clinics and assists with the development of educational programs to meet those needs. In Sept. 1998, Sept. 1999, Sept. 2000, Sept. 2001, we worked with experts from the University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine to evaluate services for sexually transmitted diseases, and coordinated workshops on STD care which brought experts in the field from the Seattle STD/HIV Prevention Center. Medical providers from the general community, as well as from the contract clinics, were in attendance.

In an effort to promote good communication and relationships between private and public health care systems, the Network nurses have been responsive to what providers have said they need to help them deliver quality care. We have developed tools and educational materials for medical providers in an effort to promote quality in the care of sexually transmitted diseases, family planning and TB.

Some of the materials used in our work include:

- Specially designed manuals—these include an emphasis on reporting , disease updates (Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, STD, TB), Statistical data, Infection Control , (emphasis on appropriate use of antibiotics and antibiotic resistance) , information on Bioterrorism and resources, phone and Web site lists
- Program flyers, brochures and posters
- CDC printed materials
- Washington State DOH materials
- CD and Immunization Newsletter
- Marketing Tools
 - Note cubes with the reporting line printed on each page
 - Pens with the reporting line printed on each one

Additional materials developed and distributed vary with the needs of the group addressed; for example the Long Term Care and Home Health people requested additional information on Infection control and resistant bacteria.

We are involved in training for providers and have arranged training in:

- STD management
- HIV/AIDS assessment and counseling
- Latent TB Infection therapy
- Individual training on new programs and policies

When new regulations are implemented, as with the HIV reporting, or urgent events, as with Bioterrorism, the Network nurses make special visits with additional materials to educate all the providers on the policy, training available to them, and resources for their patients. We also include sample chart forms to help make their job easier.

We have developed additional tools for the providers including:

- Chart forms
 - Consent forms
 - Risk assessment forms for HIV
 - STD exam form
 - LTBI therapy record
- FAX forms
- Resource and Telephone lists
- Web Site list

Network Nurses also have responsibility for other projects and programs:

- Corrections health
- Family Planning Coalition
- Vaccine for Children program
- Pierce County Immunization Coalition
- Representation for Washington State Basic Health Plan
- Refugee screening
- LTBI therapy tracking
- Writing/editing of CD and Immunization Newsletter, other health department publications and articles
- Participation in work groups as in Bio-terrorism and disaster preparedness, domestic violence, and tobacco cessation.

In the event of a disease outbreak, where a clinical response is needed immediately, the Network nurses are the first that are called upon to organize and staff the clinics. Since there are no in house clinics at Tacoma Pierce County Health Department, this means establishing mobile clinics in community sites, such as schools.

In summary Network nurses:

- Improve communication
- Promote public health
- Assure access to care
- Educate
- Work to improve care of patients with communicable disease

After over 5 years, their outreach efforts have increased communicable disease reporting and the providers and other contacts continually express their appreciation for the health department being so responsive to their needs and maintaining such good communication.

Development and organization of the activities and assignments for the nurses required researching and listing all providers in the county as well as all other services and programs that were included. The major hospital systems were the first to be assigned to the nurses and then the other providers were divided as equally as possible with some geographic consideration as well as affiliation to hospital systems.

A software program is being used to track the contacts and keep records on the visits. This program is "ACT" from Symantec. The program has the ability to sort in a variety of ways and provides reminders of repeat visits that are due. The History report is submitted to the supervisor for use in employee supervision and evaluation.

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